

Foundations of Political Effectiveness in Cooperative Extension—2009

Principles for Political Effectiveness

As a public institution, we are regularly challenged to demonstrate the value and relevance of our educational programs. We are asked to illustrate how we address the needs of citizens. Taxpayers and elected officials demand greater accountability for their tax dollar investments in Cooperative Extension programming. Our effectiveness requires that we communicate with our funding partners and other decision makers because they want to know about the return on their investment. Being politically effective is necessary for us to make sure that we are viewed as an indispensable Wisconsin resource and that we continue to receive future funding.

Strong relationships and effective communications with our funding partners are the cornerstones of our ability to continue our work within Cooperative Extension. Although being politically effective is more of an art form than a checklist of activities, core fundamental principles can help us simplify the process.

To ensure the long-term viability of our organization, it is imperative that we work to strengthen our political effectiveness, focusing on four vital areas:

- **Responsive educational programs**
- **Strong relationships with key decision makers**
- **Effective communications**
- **Fiscal awareness, political sensitivity**

Responsive Educational Programs

Our political effectiveness is based on quality educational programming and individual obligations to professionalism. Strong programs supported by partners and clientele are the foundation for positive relationships with decision makers.

- Visit <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/index.html> for Program Development and Logic Model resources.
- Develop competencies for recognizing, understanding and appreciating cultural differences as a way to strengthen the relevance of educational programs. Go to <http://uwex.uwc.edu/multicultural-awareness/> for information about Multicultural Programming.
- Center programming on current and future needs identified and valued by clients, partners and decision makers.
- Incorporate multiple resources of the University of Wisconsin system and the community into effective programming.
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/eduprog.cfm>

- Accountability, responsibility based culture and delivering transformational education are fundamental to our organization's educational mission. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/admin/responsibility/>
- Build and foster a supportive team environment. Effective teamwork is based on mutual respect for all team members' abilities and contributions.

Strong Relationships with Key Decision Makers

Building and maintaining relationships with decision makers is an ongoing process. Through these relationships, we are better able to determine situational analyses, priorities and potential inputs. We can draw upon these relationships for collaboration, networking and creating new partnerships to leverage resources and build additional political support in the future.

- Look for opportunities to spend time with decision makers. Listen and learn about their concerns, issues and ideas. Understand their motivation and perspective. <http://www.uwex.uwc.edu/government/> <http://www.uwex.uwc.edu/visitors/>
- Trust and respect decision makers. Be relevant and connected to their political agendas.
- Develop and maintain professional networks and relationships with key decision makers at all times to improve communications when difficult political situations arise. Know who you need to be connected with and why. Learn background and history from colleagues.
- Establish strong connections with all local elected officials and other key funding partners. Nurture these relationships. Maintain positive and ongoing connections with state legislators serving our districts and counties. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/admin/wacec/> <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>

Effective Communications

Honest and open communication is critical in political effectiveness and our work. Decision makers need to know about the mutual benefit of partnering and having a relationship with Cooperative Extension. When decision makers know about our programming, know the breadth of our clientele and the depth of our educational outcomes, they can appreciate our value and understand the need to fund us in the future. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/leader/modules/documents/Module8.pdf> (Page 70)

- Engage in open and ongoing dialog with decision makers. Involve them in designing solutions for problem solving and creating educational programming opportunities. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cnred/comm/documents/Systems-Web-Templatev2.pdf>
- Communicate with multiple audiences to help them understand the wide range of educational programming available through Cooperative Extension. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/news/> <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/admin/dean/staff1.cfm>
- Share success stories, impacts and outcomes with both internal and external audiences. Communicate the value of educational programs and Cooperative Extension. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/techservices/prs/> <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/employeeresources/index.cfm>

- Use evaluation tools and reports that demonstrate our accountability and that provide evidence of program impacts.
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/index.html>

Fiscal Awareness, Political Sensitivity

We must understand fiscal impacts and budget decision making processes to build responsive and effective programs. We need to be sensitive to the needs of decision makers and key stakeholders. Our political effectiveness focus should be on education and information, not lobbying, personal opinion or personal agenda.

- Discretion is warranted at all times, as decision makers are political.
- Understand fiscal conditions, constraints, policies and past practices that affect budgetary processes. <http://lgc.uwex.edu/Finance/index.html>
- We are not unique in the public budgeting process. We have an obligation to assess needs and justify programs during the policy-making and budget process.
- Funders will require evidence of programmatic, political and financial impacts of programs. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/washington/UWXOfficePrintedmaterial.html>
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/winnebago/>
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/outagamie/documents/2007Report_low_res.pdf

